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ABSTRACT

Using the "pattern approach" is a means of teaching students to be confident and competent writers. In this method, the writer uses a device called a planning blank to establish purpose, audience, topic, and role as a writer. Then the overall structure can be planned. A good writing plan should suggest not only a beginning, middle, and end, but also a form for the content of each of these parts of the work. The planning blank allows form and content to be planned on a single page, even for long works, without losing sight of audience and purpose. Instead of a traditional outline, a general pattern--such as a how-to pattern, a narrative pattern, or a problem-solution pattern--is selected first. Then a topic sentence outline is developed by supporting details. By using the pattern method students can write such business and personal communications as letters, memos, reports, market projections, analyses, recommendations, proposals, and evaluations. The following can be noted about this approach: the pattern is less important than whether the form chosen accomplishes the purpose with the audience; patterns can be varied and combined to suit the writer's purposes; the length of the writing is irrelevant to pattern; no one has turned into a robot from using this approach; and the method can be used in all content areas with all levels of student and professional writers. (EL)

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Add to Your Book: Teach a Pattern Approach to Writing

Joe Quattrini

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Add to Your Book: Teach a Pattern Approach to Writing

by Joe Quattrini

YOUR BOOK ON WRITING

By now, you've written your own "book" on writing. Every teacher writes his or her own "book": a compilation of models, problems, exercises, and technicues. You've written that book because the many books you've read about writing are just that--books *about* writing, not books on *how to write*. You know that your job is not to get students to know more about writing; it's to get them to write better.

You'd probably like your writing students to be able to:

- accomplish various communication purposes.
- adopt different roles as writers.
- write at varying levels of formality.
- plan and write in different patterns of organization.
- use varying methods to develop ideas.
- plan different topic sentence placements.
- write a variety of sentence patterns.
- use transitions and unifiers.
- control style to suit audience.
- most important of all--approach a writing problem with a sense of confidence--know where to start, know where to finish, and know how to evaluate the work.

Enter your personal "book," an effort to make the connection between what people are saying (and writing) about writing, and what we know our students have to be able to do when they write. Usually, the personal book is not for anyone else to see. No one can read it because it's in the mind of the teacher. For the same reason, the teacher can't

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read it, either. Nor can students. There are no page numbers, no index, no table of contents--yet, in a sense, the teacher "knows" the book and is constantly trying to add to it.

I think you can add to your book in a simple way: make more visible what is already there. You can help your students to better achieve the writing goals you set--yet continue to use your present writing methods and materials--if you can make your book more visible.

After a dozen years of trying to teach writing with such an invisible book, I tried to write mine down so that students (and I) could use it better. I started with the ten goals listed earlier in the article. I had in mind several levels of audience in education and in industry. I had the basic premise that <u>writing is writing:</u> the process can be made common to all students; in all content areas or disciplines; for all writing tasks, including academic, business, and personal writing. Although there are some differences between singing in the shower and singing in Carnegie Hall, in both cases there are speakers, audiences, and purposes.

OUTLINE THOUGHTS, NOT WORDS

The writing process can be <u>made</u> common if we show that every writer needs to start with a purpose, an audience, a topic, and a role as a writer. Writers who make conscious decisions about their work need to think about register, tone, organizing pattern or structure, methods of development, placement of topic sentences, sentence structure, and diction.

I couldn't find a planning or prewriting or outlining method that attended to all of these choices, so I developed

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a device called a planning blank to allow the writer to plan the work and to be aware of the choices at the same time. These choices can't all be made before writing, but they can't all be made after writing, either. I don't think it makes much sense to talk about pre-writing, writing, and editing as separate steps of the writing process. Perhaps they're not even stages. In the same way that you can think about the past and the future as you read this article in the present, a writer can plan, write, and edit at the same time. I'm using the word "planning" to include all of these processes.

The goals I listed at the beginning of the article start with purpose and continue through audience, patterns, and sentences. This is writing "from the top down," from purpose to product. The other way around just doesn't work: we can't just pile up words and expect to accomplish a purpose, as so many student writings (calibrated with the faint subscript numerals "250") have shown.

USING THE PLANNING BLANK

The writer uses the planning blank to establish purpose, audience, topic, and role as a writer. Then, the overall structure can be planned. A good writing plan should suggest not only a beginning, middle, and end, but also a <u>form</u> for the <u>content</u> of each of these parts of the work. The planning blank allows form and content to be planned on a single page, even for long works, without losing sight of audience and purpose.

I'd like to compare using this device to making a traditional outline. Do you ask students to make outlines before they write? Most books on writing say that outlining and organizing

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are important steps. I agree, but I don't think that outlining should be done by assigning Roman numerals and letters to a list of facts or ideas. My objection is that the numbers and letters don't show anything about the purpose of the work or the logical relationships among the ideas of the work.

Try an experiment. Find something you have outlined with numbers and letters and cross out or erase the numbers and letters. What have you lost? The list still reads from top to bottom, so the order of ideas is retained. The indentations show the groups of ideas, so the grouping is retained.

Numbers and letters don't really help you to outline--they just make your outline easy for someone else to understand, after you've done the organizing.

Try another experiment. Find three samples of very different pieces of writing. Then, try to make outlines of them by using letters and numbers. It won't be difficult. Since anything can be outlined with numbers and letters, these symbols must not tell us much about the pattern of thinking in the written work--which is what we need to know in order to make or use an outline.

Here are three examples of different types of writing: a recipe for apple pie, a mystery novel, and Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." Using the traditional method of outlining, all three could be done with numbers and letters--yet these three are very different with respect to audience, purpose, structure, and style!

Using the pattern method of outlining, outlines for these writings would use these three patterns of organization:

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recipe for apple pie.....how-to pattern

mystery novel.....narrative pattern

"Gettysburg Address".....opinion-reason pattern

These are completed writings. When students plan their own writings, they can use planning blanks to choose the organizing patterns which suit the contexts of the writings: the purposes, audiences, speakers, and topics.

A writer who has chosen the organizing pattern for a work of writing can outline easily, because he has established the shape of the ideas and the relationships among them. The writer can go on to use topic sentences to make an outline in the organizing pattern, using one sentence for each part of the pattern. Even though this will not result in a complete work of writing (all details will not be included), much of the thinking behind the writing will be complete.

THE PROBLEM-SOLUTION PATTERN

Below is an example of how a planning blank might be used by a writer. The writer is a person who has had to write research papers. Too many research papers. Anger and frustration have led the writer to suggest that there must be a better way to assign these papers.

There are two levels of audience for this outline:

1. other people who have suffered with ill-designed or ill-defined research topics, and

2. the people who assign these papers and reports.

From the first audience the writer would like sympathy, but from the second he would like a change in behavior: better assignments.

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The register for this writing will be informal, and the writer will use a persuasive pattern, the problem-solution pattern, to organize the work. The pattern has these parts:

Problem
Effect(s)
Cause(s)
Solution
Significance

The planning blank has the heading completed and the pattern parts listed in the margin. There are other spaces in the margin for decisions about methods of development (comparing/contrasting, etc.) and topic sentences. The writer can't make all these decisions before writing, but, during the process, can fill in decisions as they are made. This first planning blank shows the contexts of the writing and the writer's choice of pattern.

(insert first planning blank)

THE TOPIC-SENTENCE OUTLINE

The next planning blank shows a completed topic-sentence outline in the problem-solution pattern. Each sentence in the outline corresponds to one pattern part, but not necessarily to one paragraph. In the finished product, the paper written from this outline, some pattern parts may require more than one paragraph to develop. Here is the completed topic-sentence outline for the problem-solution writing.

(insert second planning blank)

Outlines from planning blanks should make sense by themselves. This outline moves logically from the problem

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Writer Frustrated Researcher Purpose Change behavior
Audience Students/Teachers Register Informal
Topic Research assignments Pattern Problem-solution

Pattern part Problem Method of Development TS placement & structure	
Pattern part Effect Method of Development TS placement & structure	
Pattern part Cause Method of Development TS placement & structure	
Pattern part Solution Method of Development TS placement & structure	
Pattern part Significance Method of Development TS placement & structure	

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Writer Frustrated researcher Purpose Change behavior
Audience Students/Teachers Register Informal
Topic Research assignments Pattern Problem-solution

Pattern part: Problem Method of Development TS placement & structure	Too many research projects turn out to be search, search, search projects; I spend most of my time aimlessly sifting through data because I have no purpose in mind except to complete the paper, to fill up the necessary pages and get it over with.
Pattern part: Effect Method of Development TS placement & structure	By the time I finally determine what data I need, I'm too mentally exhausted (and behind schedule) to do much thinking about it, to do more than copy the data or change a word or two.
Pattern part: Cause Method of Development TS placement & structure	Assignments are not specific as to purpose and audience, and, before I do the research, I never know enough about the topic to guess what my purpose should be.
Pattern part: Solution Method of Development TS placement & structure	Whoever assigns a paper should tell me the audience and purpose of my research: Is it to establish a fact, to determine a meaning, or to recommend a course of action?
Pattern part: Significance Method of Development TS placement & structure	If I know from the outset what I'm supposed to accomplish with the data, I'll be able to select and evaluate data more efficiently because I'll have a principle of selection.

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and its effects to the causes, solution, and significance, the benefits that will result from solving the problem.

These outlines should also work as blueprints for more detailed writings. The final writing may be five paragraphs or five hundred paragraphs, but the pattern of thinking and the basic content have been set by the pattern outline on the planning blank. If you set out to complete this writing by adding details from your own experience, your additions would enhance but not alter the basic structure of the writing.

APPLICATIONS OF THE METHOD

What can students write with this method? They can plan and write responses to writing questions on Regents Competency Tests, Regents Comprehensive Exams, Advanced Placement English Exams, College Entrance Achievement Tests, and instructor-made tests in any course area. The pattern method can also be used to write such business and personal communications as letters, memos, reports, market projections, analyses, recommendations, proposals, and evaluations.

I do not propose this method as THE way to write--it is A way, however, that seems to solve many of the planning and writing problems of writers in schools and business. Whether the writer is planning a thank-you note or a doctoral thesis, the pattern approach allows him to plan the work without getting lost in the details. He can organize ideas in a pattern appropriate to audience and purpose.

The form and content requirements of the beginning, the middle, and the end of the work will be evident in the planning process. The writer can begin to add detail to any part of

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the pattern, on any part of the planning blank. If the writer of the problem-solution outline felt like starting with the causes, because they were clearest in mind, he could start there and work in both directions, without losing sight of his overall plan and purpose.

The problem-solution pattern is just one of many common patterns of thinking and writing. It is typically used to organize letters of complaint, solution strategies, and advisory reports and papers. Other common patterns in academic and business writing include the opinion-reason, thesis-proof, statement-support, and how-to patterns.* The notes that follow refer to teaching a number of patterns as whole-work organizers.

SOME NOTES ON USING PATTERNS

1. What you call the pattern is less important than whether the form chosen accomplishes the purpose with the audience. In fact, this overall structure will fit almost any of the patterns:

Generalization:	writer's most important point about the topic
Detail:	idea which supports the main point
Detail:	another supporting idea
Detail:	another supporting idea
Significance:	what the writer wants the reader to think or to do about the main point

For beginning writers, this may be enough structure. For writers who want to be in control of the language, we need to make distinctions among opinions, statements, theses,

* For a more detailed treatment of these patterns and this approach, see the author's text Improving Your Writing Skills, Arco Publishing, Inc.

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problems, motivations, and other types of generalizations. I think the greatest advantage of teaching patterns is that we can expand the student's range of possibilities. I would rather have a student thinking "Which way should I approach this?" than thinking "How can I get started?"

2. Patterns can be varied and combined to suit the writer's purposes. Parts can be repeated within a pattern: three solution strategies can be offered, for example.

Parts can be arranged in other orders. A thesis-proof paper could give one proof before stating the thesis. Narratives can open *in medias res* and use flashback to tell what happened earlier.

Parts can be omitted. A compelling argument may not directly state a recommendation, as the writer may feel that the required action will be obvious to the reader (the writer could be wrong about this, of course).

3. The length of the writing is irrelevant to pattern. Here is the contents page from a book written in the how-to pattern. (insert contents page)

And here is a single sentence in that pattern:

Motivation: If you want to keep your reader's interest...
Step 1: consider audience and purpose...
Step 2: choose pattern and methods...
Step 3: control register and tone...
Application: and your writing will be interesting and effective.

When the sentence is written in its usual form, the pattern is less obvious, but it is there, nonetheless: If you want to keep your reader's interest, consider audience and purpose, choose pattern and method, control register and tone, and your writing will be interesting and effective.

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4. No one has turned into a robot from using this pattern approach. There is flexibility within patterns, and there are almost limitless combinations of patterns and methods and everything else. If making intelligent choices is an important part of the writing process, then students must have something from which to choose.

Creativity does not suffer. I think that most poor writing suffers from too little structure, not too much. Perhaps the sonnet is a useful example. The form is fairly rigid, but how many hundreds of interesting variations on the theme have been created within that structure?

5. Can this method of teaching composing complement your "book" on writing? Can your students use the patterns and the planning blanks, along with your present methods and materials, to produce the kinds of writing you want to read? Could you use pattern analysis to show a student not just that a work isn't organized, but also how to organize it properly?

If you share my goals for writers, if you want students to make decisions as they write, and if you want students to master not just a structure, but a variety of structures, then I think you can use this method to bring your "book" more into the realm of the visible.

Since this method is not tied to any body of content or to any special type of writing, it can be used in all content areas with all levels of student and professional writers.

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Because it is a whole-work organizer, the pattern method allows room for whatever competencies you wish to set for students.

The ultimate goal for students is to become confident and competent writers--planners, writers, and editors of their own work and each others' work.

When students have learned to use patterns and planning blanks, you can achieve what I think to be the ultimate role for the writing teacher: a sensitive and critical reader of writing that's worth reading.

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